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Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 484th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 5 October 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

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General debate (continued)

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GE.93-02709 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. EVERTS (World Food Programme) said that coordination within and beyond the United Nations system was a vital necessity in the field of humanitarian assistance, where duplication and waste could not be tolerated. As a highly operational agency, the World Food Programme (WFP) felt that there was considerable room for improvement in that respect. The partnership between UNHCR and WFP, now being cited as an example of what could be achieved in the area of inter-agency collaboration, had evolved from small beginnings, with WFP providing food aid in isolated cases to complement UNHCR's relief efforts. The number of operations in which the organizations worked side by side had later become so significant as to make them decide to formalize their relationship by a Memorandum of Understanding which had been concluded in 1985 and had considerably enhanced the effectiveness and efficiency of relief operations in favour of refugees. The two organizations had then continued to look for additional areas of collaboration, particularly in resource mobilization, control of the food pipeline and internal transport. A revision of the Memorandum of Understanding had taken place in mid-1991 and another review of the working arrangements, about to be completed, had formed the subject of a progress report to the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters. The relationship was based on the commitment of both sides to take advantage of the comparative strengths of each organization. In practice, that meant that WFP focused on the mobilization and transport of basic foods, while UNHCR concentrated on complementary food commodities and on non-food sectors. At the same time, the two organizations jointly assessed food aid requirements, managed the food supply pipeline and solved problems as they arose.

2. As to the challenges at hand, almost 3 million tonnes of basic food commodities worth US$ 1.3 billion would have to be delivered to over 20 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons in 1993 alone. The problem of getting the right amount of food to the right place at the right time called for the donor community's generosity, understanding and flexibility with regard to the use of pledges. The latter implied more up-front and untied cash resources for timely local and international food purchases. WFP's rapid intervention capacity in the current year was severely handicapped by the lack of cash funding for the Immediate Response Account specifically created in order to get emergency operations off to a quick start; only slightly more than 50 per cent of its target of US$ 30 million had been received so far. The World Food Programme, for its part, would spare no effort in further improving its capacity at both field and headquarters level to manage refugee relief operations in the most cost-effective manner possible, in particular by organizing joint training programmes with UNHCR, establishing a rapid response team similar to UNHCR's Emergency Response Team, cooperating more closely with non-governmental organizations and streamlining internal operational procedures. WFP was resolutely committed to serving the cause of refugees and displaced persons in the closest possible collaboration with UNHCR and other concerned partners.

3. Mr. MEGHLAOUI (Algeria) said that UNHCR emergency action, which had used to be the exception, now seemed to be the rule and that new categories,

particularly that of displaced persons, were giving rise to problems whose magnitude, in a rapidly changing and often unpredictable world, made it essential to develop a strategy of prevention and immediate assistance. Despite the success of repatriation operations conducted in several countries, the number of refugees had risen from 17 to 18 million, with the majority living in economically weak and highly vulnerable countries of the South which were bearing an increasingly heavy burden and needed greater and more fairly distributed international solidarity.

4. That dramatic situation was largely the result of the fact that, instead of being conducive to the democratization of relations between nations, the peaceful settlement of disputes and generous action to combat underdevelopment, the changes that had taken place on the international scene in the past few years were leading to an increase in fratricidal conflicts, the worsening of the economic situation in many countries and the undermining of the rules which governed the international community. The world had lost its bearings and greatly needed audacity and imagination. The phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons could not be solved without peace and sustainable development, the best form of prevention being to attack the root causes, which were well known.

5. Repatriation in safety and dignity, accompanied by the reintegration of refugees in the society of their country of origin, was still the most honourable solution. Algeria, a part of whose population had long experienced the harsh realities of refugee life, had adopted those principles in connection with the repatriation of displaced persons from Mali and had pursued them by agreement with the Government of that fraternal country and in cooperation with UNHCR and IFAD in particular. To ensure the safety and protection of persons who had found refuge on its soil was a human duty of solidarity for Algeria and, at the same time, a contribution to international peace and security. His country would continue to fulfil that duty in close collaboration with UNHCR.

6. Mr. GRUBMAYER (Austria) said that, while almost one and a half million refugees had been able to return to their countries during the past year, twice that number had been forced to seek refuge abroad, so that the world refugee population now numbered close to 19 million and the number of persons displaced within their own countries was even higher. Those figures, which were an indication of unprecedented social and human tragedies, demonstrated a failure to prevent crises, to react to them and to resolve them, all the more so as rivalries and nationalist aspirations in the aftermath of the cold war had led to political instability, intercommunal violence, armed conflicts and violations of human rights.

7. His delegation fully shared the High Commissioner's views concerning the inextricable linkage, reflected in the preamble to the 1951 Convention, between refugee protection and the search for durable solutions, on the one hand, and the larger system of human rights protection, on the other. The High Commissioner was right to pursue the further strengthening of cooperation between UNHCR and human rights bodies, including non-governmental organizations. Austria also supported the High Commissioner's call for comprehensive and integrated approaches linking humanitarian action and protection of human rights with peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-building.

8. The problem of internal displacement had assumed new and disturbing proportions. The staff support made available to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General who had been appointed to deal with that problem and who, in the space of a single year, had already provided an important input, should be considerably increased. Austria basically agreed with the High Commissioner that it was not for UNHCR to seek a global mandate for that difficult problem, although a pragmatic approach might be required in certain situations. The increased number of refugees and displaced persons and the greater complexity of assistance operations undertaken meant that the Office of the High Commissioner was stretched to its limits.

9. The recently held International Conference on the Protection of Victims of War had made the dangers inherent in the politicization of humanitarian action abundantly clear. It was unacceptable that institutions such as ICRC or UNHCR should be blackmailed or manipulated for non-humanitarian ends by the parties to a conflict. Moreover, political authorities were sometimes increasingly tempted to off-load all or part of their responsibilities on humanitarian bodies. The High Commissioner and other heads of humanitarian programmes were right to resist all challenges to their impartiality and neutrality. UNHCR's performance during the past 12 months had been outstanding, not least by reason of the exemplary cooperation extended by other agencies and programmes of the United Nations, ICRC and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The award of the Nansen Medal for 1993 to "Médecins sans Frontières" was a tribute to all those organizations. The rays of hope that had recently appeared, especially in Cambodia, and the ongoing voluntary repatriations in Africa, Asia and Central America were to be applauded.

10. Austria also welcomed the new Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of South Africa and UNHCR. The High Commissioner had expressed concern about the precariousness of massive repatriation where it was not accompanied by comprehensive reintegration and rehabilitation measures. His delegation believed that, besides UNDP and the Bretton Woods institutions, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs could play a catalytic role in that respect.

11. Among the 4 million people affected in one way or another by the war in the former Yugoslavia, tens of thousands were still exposed to threats of ill-treatment and even of summary execution. In view of the stalemate in the search for a political settlement for Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was essential to ensure safe and unhindered access to the innocent victims of that tragic conflict. Austria greatly valued the role played by the High Commissioner as Chairperson of the Humanitarian Working Group of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia and believed that Working Group should be supported by the political authorities. In turn, the parties concerned should respect the principles of international humanitarian law.

12. The concept of temporary protection, which was one of the elements of the High Commissioner's "Comprehensive response to the humanitarian crisis in the former Yugoslavia", had first been applied in Austria in respect of Croatian refugees, most of whom had in the meantime returned voluntarily to their country, and was now being applied to close to 70,000 displaced persons from regions affected by civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

13. From the outset of the crisis, Austria had funded an extensive programme of humanitarian assistance. Some US$ 120 million from public and private funds had been allocated to bilateral and multilateral projects. About 2,200 lorries, each carrying 20 tons of food, medicine and other basic products, had been dispatched to all parts of the former Yugoslavia and, in particular, to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The total amount of Austria's financial assistance to the victims of the tragic war was around US$ 280 million. His Government intended to continue its humanitarian assistance and would shortly announce new cash contributions to UNHCR and ICRC.

14. In the interest of genuine refugees, it was essential to distinguish more clearly between refugee flows and other population movements. In Austria, as in most countries of western Europe, some 90 per cent of asylum-seekers were not refugees, a situation which proved the existence of abuses that undermined the institution of asylum itself and was a drain on public funds that could be better used for assistance to refugees elsewhere. As a candidate for admission to the European Community, Austria had to think of how to harmonize its procedures with those of member countries while at the same time closely following the deliberations on the subject of asylum taking place in other forums. Unfortunately, the abuse of asylum procedures also provided fuel for xenophobic or even racist sentiments which obviously could have no place in the determination of refugee status. The Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the Council of Europe were to consider the problem at their forthcoming meeting in Vienna.

15. Mr. TSIMAKO (Observer for Botswana) said that his Government fully appreciated UNHCR's financial difficulties and was grateful for the support given to refugees in its country. It was, however, deeply concerned about delays in transfers of funds for refugee assistance programmes. Delayed transfers created unnecessary anxiety and tensions between refugees and officials in charge of assistance. Furthermore, in view of the role played by the UNHCR Branch Office in Botswana in informing headquarters about budget developments and the current needs of refugees and in view of the need to await the stabilization of the situation in certain countries of the region, his Government greatly hoped that the closure of the Branch Office would not take place before December 1994. In the intervening period, the operational capacity of the Branch Office's implementing partner should be strengthened, as promised by the Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa during his mission to Botswana in 1992. In that connection, Botswana appealed to the High Commissioner to ensure that officers sent out to Branch Offices were sensitized to the needs, problems and principles of the countries to which they were assigned.

16. It had been argued that Botswana's contribution to refugee programmes was limited to granting asylum and that it should therefore take up the recurrent costs of administering the programmes. That argument overlooked the fact that Botswana's contribution also covered free primary, secondary and vocational education for refugees, as well as free medical care and free fuel and maintenance of the vehicle fleet used for refugee transport. In 1993 alone, the Botswana Government had spent US$ 46,237 on refugee education, in addition to US$ 142,247 allocated for that purpose in 1992. Those amounts were far from negligible considering that the corresponding contribution by UNHCR had

amounted to $37,510 and $41,513, respectively. His Government therefore did not have the means to take over additional costs, not to mention the fact that care and maintenance programmes were in direct conflict with its principle of self-reliance.

17. History had again and again revealed the urgent need for emergency preparedness programmes; accordingly, developing countries should be assisted to draw up such programmes without diverting funds from original development objectives. The aim of such programmes should be to ensure that, in times of emergency, appropriate systems, procedures and resources were put in place in order to assist the people affected by the emergency to help themselves. The programmes would also minimize the emergency's adverse effects and ensure an effective response. Accordingly and given the country's population and fragile infrastructure, his Government requested the international community's assistance in setting up such a programme.

18. In document A/AC.96/809 UNHCR had taken the praiseworthy initiative of evaluating its repatriation and reintegration programmes; it should also identify organizations and Governments which could assist in the rehabilitation programmes through bilateral aid agreements. Returnees should play a role in the development and reconstruction of their home countries, thus reasserting their national identity. UNHCR's response in assisting internally displaced persons was also to be commended, although its future mandate in that respect needed to be clearly established. The results of the evaluation reports on returnee aid and development and the report on internally displaced persons needed to be thoroughly discussed at a special meeting of members of the Executive Committee and the resolutions drawn up at the meeting should be forwarded to the General Assembly for adoption.

19. Mr. SHAMSHUR (Observer for Ukraine) said that the present scope of refugee flows, generated primarily by regional conflicts, and the complexity of the related problems called for concerted efforts on the part of Governments, intergovernmental structures, non-governmental organizations and public and private foundations. Those efforts could be successful only if they were based on a sound and realistic strategy such as that formulated in the documents which had been submitted by UNHCR and envisaged combining the traditional activities of protection and assistance with more innovative approaches to the prevention and solution of refugee problems. Equally productive was UNHCR's intention to achieve a higher level of coordination with other United Nations relief agencies and humanitarian bodies. The turbulent developments of recent years had revealed the degree of interdependence between human migration and such basic concepts as respect for human rights, inviolability of borders and territorial integrity, as well as the difficulties inherent in radical social and economic transformations. On the other hand, experience also showed the limits of preventive action and underscored the importance of readiness to tackle emergency situations.

20. Interethnic conflicts and social and political strife in countries on the periphery of the former Soviet Union had driven tens of thousands of persons to seek refuge in Ukraine. At the same time, there were 6.8 million ethnic Ukrainians and other Ukrainian nationals residing in practically all parts of the former Soviet Union, many of them in regions of actual or potential armed conflict. The Ukrainian minority was also bearing its share of hardship in

the wars in the former Yugoslavia, where the Ukrainian contingent of the United Nations peace-keeping force was contributing to the protection of international relief operations. Ukraine was also faced with the special problem of the hundreds of thousands of Crimean Tatars, Germans, Greeks, Bulgarians and others who had suffered mass deportation from Ukraine during the Second World War and its aftermath. Those displaced persons did not fit the internationally accepted definition of refugees and were therefore in a legal limbo, but their problems were urgent and called for prompt resolution. The Ukrainian State was willing to accept those former deportees and to assist in their resettlement, a process already begun in the case of 200,000 Crimean Tatars whose resettlement has placed a considerable burden on the Ukrainian economy. His Government appealed to the moral authority of UNHCR to encourage the States from which the return flows originated to assume a fair share of the costs of the resettlement process.

21. Ukraine was grateful to UNHCR for its technical and consultative assistance, which had, in particular, been instrumental in the organization in Kiev of a seminar on the legal aspects of problems concerning refugees and migrants. Having to deal virtually on its own with problems of refugees and migrants which it had never had to face before, his country counted on the understanding and direct assistance of other countries and international bodies, including UNHCR. In that connection, it hoped that the Executive Committee would give some attention to another phenomenon as yet unknown to international law, namely, that of ecological refugees. Owing to the same budgetary and material constraints, almost 700,000 victims of the Chernobyl disaster were still waiting to be moved from heavily contaminated areas, while others who had been resettled in other parts of Ukraine were confronted with the difficult task of rebuilding their lives. It was to be hoped that, in cooperation with other United Nations relief agencies, UNHCR would eventually extend its protection to those persons.

22. Mr. BOIDIEL (Observer for Mauritania) said that his delegation noted with concern and sadness that the number of refugees worldwide had never been so great, that UNHCR action was increasingly called for and that, in many situations, solutions still seemed difficult to find. His country, which had itself embarked on the difficult process of development and democratization, had for the past two years, been giving asylum to nationals of a fraternal country whose regional history it shared. With the assistance of UNHCR and WFP, it was doing everything in its power to provide decent living conditions for the refugees, who now numbered over 45,000, even though the basic needs of its own nationals remained unmet. Voluntary and gradual repatriation would be the only reasonable solution, but it was a difficult process requiring efforts of which the protagonists and victims of the situation were not always capable. There was thus a need for international solidarity.

23. He commended UNHCR on its efforts to find solutions that would make it possible to put an end to such situations. Unfortunately, those efforts were not a substitute for the will of States, not only of those providing asylum and those temporarily unable to protect all their nationals, but also those which, by reason of their importance and their influence at the international level, could make a decisive contribution to the disappearance of the causes of exile, thereby restoring the conditions necessary for peace, progress and the promotion of human rights.

24. Mr. OSMAN (Organization of African Unity) thanked the Executive Committee for inviting the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to attend the present session. OAU commended the efforts being made by the Office of the High Commissioner and its enormous contribution to the search for lasting solutions to the African refugee problem. In particular, it welcomed the fact-finding missions undertaken for that purpose in various parts of Africa. Visits to camps for refugees and displaced persons, such as that made by the then Chairman of the Executive Committee in 1992, should start a tradition to be maintained in the future.

25. Africa's refugee population was constantly increasing. It had now gone beyond the 6 million mark, while the number of internally displaced persons stood at 15 million. That was happening at a time when the capacity of States to cope with the situation had been greatly reduced by the seriousness of world economic problems, the escalation of conflicts in a number of African countries of asylum and the consequences of natural disasters. The situations in Liberia, Somalia and Angola were examples of unprecedented human tragedy. OAU was endeavouring to remedy the root causes of such situations and to promote sustainable economic and social development on the African continent. In that connection, he drew attention to the Declaration adopted by the 29th OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government and calling for the establishment of a mechanism for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa. A wind of change was blowing across the African continent. People wanted to participate in determining their own political future and the Governments of the OAU member States were encouraging popular participation, economic development and national reconciliation.

26. Another positive development in Africa had been the formation of national human rights commissions. Many member States had acceded to the international legal instruments on refugees, in particular the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and the 1981 African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights. Many OAU member States had also declared a general amnesty. Thanks to those measures, a large number of African refugees and exiles had been encouraged to return to countries of origin such as Ethiopia, Eritrea and Mozambique, to mention just a few. OAU promoted such efforts on the part of its member States and hoped to be able to continue to count on the assistance, cooperation and support of UNHCR and the international donor community.

27. In the particular case of Rwanda, there was at present political will to create an atmosphere conducive to the repatriation of Rwandese refugees, mainly from neighbouring countries. Since the outbreak of armed hostilities in Rwanda in October 1990, OAU had been actively engaged in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict and its efforts had culminated in the signing of a peace agreement between the two parties on 4 August 1993. He appealed to UNHCR to provide the necessary assistance to and support for the implementation of the Dar-es-Salaam Plan of Action provided for in the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Rwandese Refugees.

28. OAU welcomed the positive developments taking place in South Africa and, in view of those developments, had requested the lifting of the economic sanctions still in force against that country. The creation of a non-racial democratic society in South Africa would facilitate the voluntary repatriation

of thousands of South Africans who had fled their country as a result of apartheid and racism. OAU would participate in their repatriation and would need international support in that regard.

29. OAU had a Commission of Fifteen on Refugees whose role was to formulate policy proposals and recommendations relating to refugees and displaced persons in Africa. In dealing with the question of the root causes of the problem of refugees and displaced persons, the Commission had undertaken fact-finding missions to several OAU member countries, namely, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It had also held extensive discussions at the level of the OAU Council of Ministers and had provided emergency assistance to several African States hosting large numbers of refugees, returnees and displaced persons.

30. In order to achieve their common goals of providing protection and assistance to refugees, especially in Africa, OAU and UNHCR should strengthen their cooperation, which should be aimed at making the international community more aware of the plight of refugees, returnees and displaced persons, most of whom were in Africa; implementing the programme for mass voluntary repatriation, resettlement and rehabilitation in affected countries such as Rwanda, Liberia, Somalia, Mozambique and Eritrea; increasing the resources available and the assistance given to countries of origin during the repatriation exercise; and supporting democratization initiatives and national reconstruction processes leading to peace and the settlement of conflicts in various parts of Africa.

31. Despite its limited resources, OAU granted scholarships to refugee students and promoted income-generating projects in some African countries designed to enable refugees to become self-sufficient. He urgently appealed to all donor countries and philanthropic agencies to provide financial assistance to refugee-related plans and projects. OAU had collaborated not only with UNHCR, but also with other international organizations involved in refugee work in Africa, and hoped that such cooperation would be continued and further enhanced in future.

32. Mr. PAZ (Argentina) said that asylum was a central institution of international protection and its importance must not be diminished in any way by the new activities undertaken by UNHCR. Refugees were fleeing extremely serious situations, abandoning their homes, their land and all their security. The majority went to neighbouring countries, which were also going through a serious economic crisis. The mass inflow of refugees was an additional burden on already precarious economies. While the number of persons enjoying refugee status was larger than ever before, the increasing number of practices which prevented the enjoyment of that right, including refoulement, which was prohibited by article 33 of the 1951 Convention, was still a matter of serious concern.

33. Closing borders served no purpose. What needed to be done was to develop prevention and early warning measures and to establish safe areas inside territories affected by a conflict. It was by promoting policies of socio-economic development and respect for human rights in countries of origin that durable solutions to the problem of mass exoduses would be found. He recalled the time when thousands of refugees and immigrants fleeing violence

and famine had landed in Latin America and had been given hospitality and the hope of a new life. The countries whose populations had then been at the receiving end of a generous attitude were perhaps the same that now tended to forget that no one could be sure that he would never again find himself in a similar situation. UNHCR should therefore be encouraged to continue practising what might be described as "active neutrality". The development of international crises called for great flexibility in the implementation of innovative measures that would make for an efficient response.

34. In Latin America, the progress made in the past few years held out hope for a definitive settlement of the refugee problem. Central America, the theatre of large-scale refugee flows and movements of persons displaced by armed conflict, had served as a "test bench" for the international community and the United Nations system. The work of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) counted for a great deal in the results achieved.

35. The Mexican Government was making great efforts to complete the repatriation of Guatemalan refugees from its territory, a process which was to be completed in May 1994. Argentina was therefore entirely in favour of Mexico's assuming the chairmanship of CIREFCA.

36. Drawing attention to the continuing fragility of the social and political situation in several Latin American countries, he stressed the need to remain vigilant and not to yield to the easy temptations of discouragement, on the one hand, and national selfishness, on the other. Concerted efforts and solidarity would make it possible to advance towards peace and development in conditions of democracy and respect for human rights. For those reasons, the UNHCR Office should redouble its efforts in Haiti in support of the action taken by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Organization of American States with a view to the full and definitive restoration of democracy and respect for human rights in that country.

37. Latin America was often the destination of migratory flows from other continents. The search for durable solutions would require new efforts on the part of UNHCR and close cooperation between UNHCR and other organizations engaged in similar activities, such as the International Organization for Migration. In conclusion, he invited the members of the Executive Committee to remember the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Where justice reigns, there freedom lives and thought can breathe".

38. Mr. SILWEYA (Observer for Zambia) said that the refugee population in his country now stood at over 140,000, with new refugees arriving every day. At the forty-third session of the Executive Committee, his delegation had expressed optimism that mass repatriation to countries of origin would prove possible, but, unfortunately, that hope had not materialized. Zambia continued to face serious economic hardships. It therefore greatly welcomed the assistance which UNHCR was providing and as a result of which the situation of refugees, especially in refugee settlements, had improved greatly. Unfortunately, fewer than 50,000 of the refugees now in Zambian territory lived in UNHCR-assisted settlements, while other, spontaneously settled refugees continued to live under tragic conditions. Zambia had reported the situation of that category of refugees to both the first and the

second International Conferences on Assistance to Refugees in Africa. It had presented five project proposals aimed at improving the living conditions of such refugees. Only two of those proposals had been funded. He therefore appealed for UNHCR assistance in funding projects considered to be of vital importance in refugee-impacted areas, where health facilities were lacking and access roads had to be built.

39. In 1991, Zambia, like Lesotho, had gone through a process of political transformation which had resulted in the installation of a democratically elected administration. His country's traditional policy on the question of refugees remained unchanged. Zambia would continue to receive anb grant asylum to refugees in accordance with internationally accepted criteria. It stood ready to facilitate the repatriation of refugees whenever favourable conditions for their return to their countries of origin had been created. His Government was currently working very closely with UNHCR and the Government of Mozambique with a view to facilitating the safe return of Mozambican refugees to their country. His delegation hoped to make use of its present stay in Geneva in order to enhance and reinforce the modalities of that return.

40. Mr. JOKONYA (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that the Peace Agreement concluded by the Mozambican Government and RENAMO in Rome in October 1992 had brought relative peace to Mozambique and had made it possible to embark on repatriation programmes. That was the object of the tripartite agreement concluded in March 1993 by the Mozambican and Zimbabwean Governments and UNHCR. Over 2,000 refugees had been repatriated in June 1993 and it was hoped that over 10,000 would have been repatriated by the end of the year. A great deal depended on Mozambique's absorptive capacity.

41. Repatriation was, however, an unpredictable exercise and the scaling-down of care and maintenance programmes was to be avoided. Despite the repatriations undertaken, the number of refugees continued to increase. Those Mozambicans who had spontaneously settled among Zimbabweans were now coming to the refugee camps in the hope of benefiting from the organized repatriation programme. Others were coming in from areas in Mozambique which were experiencing food distribution problems. Scaling-down the care and maintenance programmes would not only undermine Zimbabwe's ability to look after those still in the camps, but would also make it less able to contend with future influxes. For example, one of the implementing partners responsible for sanitation had pulled out in June because it had assumed that the repatriation programme would be completed within two months. Zimbabwe noted with apprehension the reduction in the UNHCR allocation to its programmes and hoped that the necessary flexibility would be exercised in the matter in the light of developments on the ground.

42. His delegation welcomed the appointment of a Senior Coordinator on Environmental Issues. The establishment of refugee camps gave rise to some serious environmental problems. It could be said that the camps were quasi-urban centres set up in rural areas. Instead of the unique solutions that were needed, only simplistic solutions had been applied so far. In the disposal of human waste, for example, use was being made of Blair toilets which filled up in a short time and necessitated the digging of additional ones. The full environmental impact of that approach was still to be

measured. Instead of digging Blair toilets for a population of 50,000 people, a more workable solution would be to instal a waterborne sewage disposal system. Other environmental problems, such as deforestation, also arose.

43. Zimbabwe welcomed the material and food assistance UNHCR and WFP had provided to the refugees, whose situation had greatly improved as a result. The proposed training programmes for those who were to be involved in food distribution would further enhance the work being done in that key area. UNHCR and WFP had responded in a timely and effective manner to the devastating drought which had affected Zimbabwe in 1992. His Government wished also to express thanks to all donor countries, as well as to UNHCR, which had helped, through its disaster preparedness, to avert a major disaster.

44. Zimbabwe was aware of its international obligations in respect of refugees and would continue to discharge them to the best of its ability. As part of his country's contribution to international efforts in preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution, the President of Zimbabwe was personally concerned within the framework of OAU with the political crisis and human tragedy unfolding in Angola. The situation in that country called for urgent humanitarian intervention. Zimbabwe hoped that the international community would provide a timely response to that unprecedented disaster. It had no doubt about the international community's ability to cope with all the challenges facing it.

45. Mr. GALGALO (Observer for Kenya) said that, since the preceding session of the Executive Committee, many changes had taken place in the world, particularly in Africa, Asia and Europe. The situation in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Liberia and Sudan gave rise to particular concern.

46. The people of Somalia continued to suffer from the multiple tragedies which had resulted in the flight of over 1 million people into neighbouring countries. The more than 400,000 refugees, including some 300,000 of Somali origin, hosted by Kenya placed a heavy strain on the country's limited human, physical and financial resources. In addition to the economic problems it caused, the presence of so many refugees involved the degradation of the environment and Kenya appealed to the international community to assist financially and materially in rehabilitating the land in areas where refugee camps had been established.

47. Despite all those difficulties, his country would continue to assist refugees in accordance with its international obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 OAU Convention. In that connection, he stressed the cordial nature of the relationship between his Government and the High Commissioner and thanked her for agreeing to give logistic and administrative support to the Kenyan National Refugee Coordinating Secretariat, for visiting Kenya in early 1993 in order to see for herself the situation and problems of the refugee presence in the country and for making it possible for some 45,000 Ethiopian refugees to be repatriated from the former Walda camp. He also thanked the Governments and peoples of the United States of America, Canada, Australia and the Scandinavian countries for accepting some asylum-seekers in their respective countries. His Government also thanked UNHCR and other international agencies

for their efforts to ensure the delivery of goods and services across the border, thus making it possible for asylum-seekers to return to their homes.

48. Kenya, in turn, would continue to grant customs and immigration waivers for goods, vehicles and personnel going into Somalia for such operations. It would provide the necessary security and an enabling administrative climate for the agencies' operations. In order to provide those services fully, it would need more material and financial support to supplement its own resources.

49. He also thanked non-governmental organizations such as Care International, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Kenya Red Cross Society for their assistance, as well as the many friendly countries which had sent donations of food, equipment and medicines.

50. The presence of a very large number of asylum-seekers, some of whom carried offensive weapons, had caused severe security problems for the local communities, the refugees themselves and the international staff working in the camps and in adjoining areas. Incidents of insecurity had increased in urban areas, along public highways and in the country's North-Eastern Province and vehicles belonging to local and international staff had been violently removed. There had also been reports of violence against refugee women and young girls in the camps and among the local population. In that connection, his Government refuted allegations which had recently appeared in the media and, in particular, a report by African Rights blaming UNHCR and the Government of Kenya for failing to take adequate security measures. Finding that it was dangerous to have large numbers of refugees accommodated in or near urban centres, his Government had been compelled to relocate some of the camps to safer areas.

51. Deeply concerned as it was about the plight of refugees and displaced persons in East Africa, his Government had been closely involved in the search for peace in the region and welcomed the Peace Accord signed with respect to Mozambique. In conclusion, his delegation appealed once again for further assistance to Kenya and, in particular, for the speeding up of repatriation and resettlement cases.

52. Mr. MOKBIL (Observer for Yemen) said that, at the preceding session of the Executive Committee, his country had had the opportunity to draw attention to its efforts in hosting and settling refugees from the Horn of Africa despite the many problems resulting from its reunification and the repatriation of almost 1 million Yemenis from neighbouring countries. On the same occasion, Yemen had indicated its sincere intention to cooperate with UNHCR. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and many of the country's highly placed personalities had thus received UNHCR delegations and had met with Mrs. Ogata in Vienna during the International Conference on Human Rights. Moreover, the Prime Minister had visited Mrs. Ogata in her office and invited her to travel to Yemen to see for herself how his Government was caring for the refugees.

53. Since then, having taken cognizance of UNHCR's documents concerning its activities and, in particular, of document A/AC.96/808, his delegation would have liked to request that the agenda of the current session should include an item on the situation of refugees in Yemen, if necessary, by enlisting the assistance of a member State of the Executive Committee, but it had not realized what the secretariat's working methods were like. That was all the more regrettable in that the Government of Yemen had been prompt to take in refugees and to provide them with all the assistance and protection they needed.

54. All that his delegation could do, therefore, was to make some brief comments on the content of document A/AC.96/808. That report stated that Yemen was hosting about 56,000 Somali refugees. His Government nevertheless estimated that number to be 120,000. According to the same document, 30,000 of those 56,000 Somali refugees in Yemen were allegedly of Yemeni origin. That fact did not dispense UNHCR from treating those persons according to the criteria applicable to refugees, since they no longer had any roots in Yemen. Those who still had close relatives in Yemen had joined those relatives and had resettled in their places of origin with the assistance of the Government and the Yemeni Red Crescent. With regard to the refugees who were said by UNHCR to be of Yemeni origin, he cited the case of a person who had been denied UNHCR assistance on the pretext that one of his ancestors had emigrated to Somalia 100 years previously. The case had been brought to the attention of the Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee in a letter from the person concerned. On that day, moreover, he himself had received another letter addressed to the President of the Yemen Republic by Somali refugees complaining of UNHCR's refusal to give them any assistance whatever on the pretext that their ancestors had been of Yemeni origin, whereas they had been settled in Somalia for 1,264 years. A copy of the letter had been sent to the Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee.

55. Because of the situation described, a large number of refugees were scattered in various provinces of the Republic, particularly in Aden (30,000 refugees), Hodeida (26,000), Sanaa (23,000) and Taiz (5,000). The influx had created many economic, social and security problems and had weighed on the social, humanitarian and health services provided by the State to the country's poor and other disadvantaged groups. A comparative study of the amounts allocated, respectively, to Yemen ($2,161,000 for something between 30,000 and 120,000 refugees), Egypt ($2,158,000 for 5,000 refugees), Belize ($2,700,000 for 13,000 refugees) and Guatemala ($7,500,000 for 4,000 refugees) showed that Yemen was getting a rather poor deal, especially as the cost of living there was far higher than in the other countries referred to. In addition, no consideration at all was given to problems connected with the refugees' education, health and social welfare.

56. For all those reasons, his delegation considered that the refugees should be housed in centres and that UNHCR should shoulder its responsibilities with regard to the provision of accommodation, food, drinking water and health and educational services. Yemen, for its part, was prepared to collaborate with UNHCR. He urged the Executive Committee to appoint a working group to visit Yemen in order to investigate the numbers and situation of refugees from the Horn of Africa, especially Somali refugees, and to report on the matter to the Executive Committee.

57. The CHAIRMAN said that, as the former Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee, he had not received any of the letters or copies of letters mentioned by the observer for Yemen in his statement and therefore had no knowledge of the facts referred to. As to the other points raised by the Yemen delegation, the UNHCR secretariat had taken note of the criticism of the figures and other information contained in the report and would respond to it in the appropriate way at the appropriate time.

58. Mr. MIZERE (Observer for Malawi) thanked UNHCR and the High Commissioner personally, as well as the donor community, for their assistance, which had enabled his country to cope with the refugee problem. Malawi, which had hosted over 1 million Mozambican refugees in 1992, had had 932,988 such refugees in August 1993 and the number was decreasing as a result of spontaneous voluntary repatriation.

59. However, while UNHCR and other aid agencies had effectively met the refugees' care and maintenance requirements, the long-term impact on Malawi's economy and development had not been addressed. In view of the magnitude of the refugee programmes, the Government had had to fund a portion of the refugee assistance out of its own revenues. Since the aggregate level of Government expenditure was governed by the World Bank structural adjustment programme, any allocation of revenues to refugee programmes had a direct impact on the amount of expenditure available for the national development programme. That pressure on public resources and services had resulted in the deterioration of the country's basic infrastructure, including deforestation, land degradation, road damage and worsening health, education and water facilities. Moreover, the steadily increasing demand for already scarce goods and services had led to the crowding out of Malawian access to Government programmes. The refugee-hosting areas' absorption capacity and economies therefore had to be strengthened for the benefit of both local and refugee communities.

60. Malawi hoped that the donor community would raise the level of assistance to enable it to provide the required care and protection for the refugees until they returned to their own country. Voluntary repatriation needed to be speeded up and Malawi wholeheartedly supported the High Commissioner's efforts for that purpose. The General Peace Agreement concluded between the Government of Mozambique and RENAMO in October 1992 was doubly welcome in that it would facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Mozambican refugees and also open up his landlocked country's shortest route to the sea. Over 200,000 refugees had already voluntarily returned and settled in their country and a working group was investigating strategies that would help to speed up the process.

61. It was, however, regrettable to note that most of the returnees were settling close to the Malawi border and still trekked back to Malawi for their rations. Despite the relative peace in Mozambique, conditions for a permanent return did not appear to be present, since the areas to which the refugees returned had been devastated by the civil war and the former combatants still had to be disarmed. His Government knew that many refugees would be willing to return only on condition of permanent peace in Mozambique and therefore appealed to United Nations bodies and the international community to mobilize the funds required to set up a mechanism for demobilizing and disarming former

soldiers, monitoring the peace process, supplying returnees with assistance for the resumption of agricultural activities, rehabilitating the infrastructure in Mozambique - particularly wells, schools, health facilities, roads and bridges - and transporting the refugees back to their areas of origin in Mozambique. Without international assistance, the host countries, including Malawi, would not be able to provide the necessary support indefinitely.

62. Voluntary repatriation was therefore a matter of urgency and refugees still on Malawi soil should continue to receive support from UNHCR and the donor agencies. While it was right that the attention of the international community should be focused on voluntary repatriation and the post-return requirements of returnees, special attention should also be given to the plight of asylum countries like Malawi which had continued to provide asylum for refugees despite their own limited resources. The presence of large numbers of refugees was exerting heavy pressure on the nation's resources, as well as on the environment, the infrastructure and health and education services.

63. Although UNHCR and the donor agencies had contributed substantial funds in support of national efforts, many needs were still unmet. For example, the cost of refugee medical services and the maintenance of health facilities were still considerable and the assistance given in that field remained inadequate. His Government therefore appealed to UNHCR and the donor community to provide more funding for the rehabilitation of areas vacated by refugees and for dealing with the adverse impact of the refugees' presence on the social and economic infrastructure and the environment. With international cooperation and assistance, Malawi hoped to be able to rise to the challenges facing it.

64. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) said that, despite the political settlements which had ended conflicts in some parts of the world and despite the progress made in the process of peaceful settlement, the magnitude of the tensions which the international community had not been able to foresee or to prevent, especially in the former Yugoslavia and in central Europe, gave rise to continuing concern. It was to be hoped that diplomacy would make it possible to settle the conflicts in areas threatened as a result not only of political change, but also of the economic situation and the social crisis, which were the root causes of emergency situations leading to increases in refugee numbers.

65. Some encouraging results had been achieved in the field of voluntary repatriation and it was to be hoped that the operations that had started would continue in the coming years. The return to their countries of over 3 million persons, particularly to Afghanistan, Cambodia, Mozambique and Guatemala, and the agreements signed by UNHCR with the Governments of South Africa and Bangladesh were positive steps that should be encouraged in other parts of the world by creating the conditions necessary for the free expression of the will of the peoples concerned and by guaranteeing their return in dignity and safety. Flagrant violations of the physical and moral integrity of refugees should be firmly condemned and the perpetrators severely punished. Measures already taken should be strengthened so as to ensure the safety of refugees under all circumstances, taking account of the legitimate interests of States and of the refugees themselves.

66. Women and children accounted for 80 per cent of the world's refugees. UNHCR, which in recent years had adopted a new approach to the protection of the most vulnerable groups, should be assured of the international community's support in continuing in that direction. His delegation agreed that a senior official should be appointed to facilitate cooperation between UNHCR and the traditional countries of asylum.

67. Despite large-scale repatriation exercises, the African continent still had the highest number of refugees and displaced persons. In view of the precarious economic situation and limited absorption capacity of the host countries, the international community had to mobilize itself more actively on behalf of both the refugees and the countries hosting them; that also applied to the people of Bosnia, especially sorely tried by the conflict being waged in the name of "ethnic cleansing". Since the great majority of refugees throughout the world depended on UNHCR's humanitarian assistance, solidarity required that the international community should make an additional effort to provide the Office of the High Commissioner with increased financial resources that would enable it to cope with the situation and to improve its emergency response capacity. His country had not hesitated to show solidarity with affected countries, refugees and populations through bilateral aid, as well as through humanitarian institutions, particularly on behalf of refugees in Angola, Mozambique, Somalia and Bosnia.

68. With regard to the question of Western Sahara, his country was continuing to facilitate the work of the Secretary-General, as proved by its agreement in principle to the "compromise" proposed by the Secretary-General on the interpretation and application of the criteria to be met for the purpose of participation in the referendum.

69. Mr. ENNACEUR (Tunisia) said that his delegation was deeply concerned about the continuing lack of safety and inadequate protection for asylum-seekers and refugees. The international community should make every effort to stop flagrant breaches of international law and violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of refugees. His delegation particularly supported the approach of ensuring not only the physical safety, but also the moral well-being of refugees, in particular by reuniting families of refugees separated by force, providing adequate housing and guaranteeing the right to voluntary repatriation to countries of origin.

70. The Office of the High Commissioner should continue its cooperation and consultations with the Centre for Human Rights, particularly to consider the possibility that Special Rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights might devote part of their reports to threats to the security of refugees and to the rights of refugee women. Violations of that kind committed in various parts of the world, especially in Bosnia and in Africa, were a disgrace to mankind. The international community should therefore assign priority and adequate resources to appropriate assistance for the many victims of humanitarian situations and, in particular, for the victims of drought and famine in Africa. In that connection, UNHCR was to be commended on working together with OAU to organize events to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary in 1994 of the entry into force of the OAU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

71. He greatly welcomed the establishment of the UNHCR Working Group on Programme Management and Operational Capacity and supported the recommendations it had already made, although, in his view, the implementation of those recommendations should be monitored more closely. Agreements concluded with certain non-governmental organizations to strengthen UNHCR emergency teams, the agreement concluded with the United Nations Volunteers and those concluded with other non-governmental organizations with a view to the joint evaluation of needs and the implementation of UNHCR programmes were also to be welcomed. The strengthening of UNHCR's emergency response capacity was likewise a timely initiative which would make it possible to meet the concerns expressed in that regard at the preceding session of the Executive Committee.

72. With regard to the possible establishment of a post of inspector of operational activities, his delegation drew attention to the need to avoid any duplication with the work of bodies that existed within UNHCR, as well as with that of other competent United Nations bodies, and to ensure that, if the post was established, the work of the inspector would be associated with that of the follow-up committee.

73. His delegation welcomed the efforts undertaken in connection with training, refresher courses and workshops for UNHCR staff, as well as the increased use being made of the services of external consultants in the performance of the increasingly complex and varied tasks entrusted to UNHCR. Non-governmental organizations could contribute usefully to training activities for international and Government officials. Encouragement should also be given to continued cooperation between UNHCR and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo (Italy), which had proved its competence and efficiency. UNHCR should be increasingly encouraged to entrust certain operational tasks to qualified partners so that it might increase its own programming, coordination and follow-up efforts and strengthen its role, which was essential to refugee protection.

74. Mr. RANDOLPH (Observer for Benin) said that conflicts resulting from intolerance and the quest for power had dramatic consequences for the third world in general and for Africa in particular. After a peaceful transition, his own country had been living since April 1991 under a regime of pluralist democracy based on respect for human rights and free enterprise. By reason of its location in the West African subregion, it had frequently hosted refugees, particularly at the time of the Biafran war in 1970 and the Chad hostilities in 1982. As a result of the crisis in Togo, Benin had taken in more than 150,000 Togolese refugees since the beginning of 1993, thanks to the fraternal generosity of the Benin people.

75. The sudden influx of so many persons had, however, inevitably brought considerable pressure to bear on his country's health and educational services, housing and food and water supplies, especially in places near the border with Togo. In order to meet assistance needs, the Benin Government had at first mobilized its own resources, but, in view of the size of the influx and the seriousness of the refugees' situation, it had had to enlist the help of the international community in setting up an emergency programme. Some food assistance was thus being furnished by the World Food Programme and food was being distributed by non-governmental organizations, such as Caritas and

the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Health assistance was designed to improve infrastructure, to provide care and medicine and to improve sanitary conditions for the refugees. Thanks to a large contribution by UNHCR, some 7,000 Togolese schoolchildren had been able to continue their schooling during the school year 1992-1993. His delegation was deeply grateful to the international community, the United Nations specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and certain countries, including China, Morocco, Korea and Germany, which had responded positively to Benin's appeal.

76. Despite the considerable efforts made so far, there was still a great deal to be done; while resources were beginning to run out, some 112,000 Togolese refugees were still being cared for in refugee centres in Benin. His Government was concerned about the situation in the field. Benin was a State subject to the rule of law and dedicated to the cause of human rights. It hoped that a peaceful settlement would be found to the crisis in Togo so that the refugee populations might return home in peace and safety. However, Benin had never closed its borders with Togo and respected its traditions of hospitality.

77. With regard to the situation in Liberia, a Government mission from Benin had visited Liberia in order to see what progress had been achieved in the implementation of the peace agreements signed in Cotonou on 25 July 1993. The will for peace expressed by the Liberians deserved firm support and it was to be hoped that humanitarian action would go together with political and military action in establishing the definitive peace on which the security and economic development of the States of the subregion depended.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.